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UNFPA – Evaluation Policy

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UNFPA EVALUATION POLICY

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

Pursuant to decision 2008/12 of the Executive Board, the Executive Director is pleased to present the UNFPA evaluation policy. Evaluation at UNFPA is a comprehensive function that reinforces accountability, oversight and learning in order to support management decisions and enhance programme effectiveness. The policy provides an overarching framework of the principles, roles and responsibilities for evaluation in UNFPA. UNFPA will report regularly to the Executive Board on evaluation. The evaluation policy does not include the operational details of its implementation, which UNFPA will address through internal guidelines on evaluation.

Guided by General Assembly resolution 62/208, the evaluation policy focuses on strengthening national evaluation capacity by using participatory and inclusive approaches, and by supporting country-led evaluations. UNFPA seeks to harmonize and align the policy with the evaluation efforts of United Nations partners through the use of common approaches and joint evaluations. The evaluation policy is consistent with and complements the UNFPA oversight policy (DP/FPA/2008/14) and the UNFPA accountability framework (DP/FPA/2007/20), with the goal of further strengthening results-based management by building a robust evaluation function in UNFPA.

The Division for Oversight Services, in line with the UNFPA oversight policy and the UNFPA accountability framework, will continue to undertake independent evaluations and provide quality assurance of evaluations. Country offices, regional offices and divisions at headquarters will manage decentralized evaluations. The evaluations of the Division for Oversight Services and the decentralized evaluations provide the necessary coverage for a comprehensive system of evaluation that reinforces accountability and learning. All UNFPA managers are accountable for ensuring that evaluations are performed in accordance with this policy and that the necessary follow-up is undertaken.

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Pursuant to decision 2008/12 of the Executive Board, the Executive Director is pleased to submit to the Executive Board the UNFPA evaluation policy. The purpose of the policy is to establish a common institutional basis for the UNFPA evaluation function and enhance the quality of evaluations. The policy will contribute to ensuring the independence of the evaluation function and will guide the conduct of evaluations for organizational learning, management for results, and accountability.

2. The evaluation policy responds to General Assembly resolution 62/208 on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (hereinafter referred to as the triennial comprehensive policy review), which calls for greater ownership by national governments of the evaluation of development results; greater efforts to build national evaluation capacity; and the promotion of collaborative approaches to evaluation among United Nations organizations. The evaluation policy will guide UNFPA efforts to build partnerships and strengthen the capacity of programme countries to take ownership of the evaluation of development results.

3. The evaluation policy also responds to the 2005 UNFPA independent evaluation report entitled "Strengthening evaluation for improved programming: UNFPA evaluation quality assessment", which stressed that evaluation should better serve the needs of management. According to this meta evaluation, the UNFPA evaluation approach was narrowly focused on accountability. In response to those findings, the UNFPA evaluation policy underscores that evaluation is a comprehensive function that incorporates accountability, oversight and learning.

4. The evaluation policy is consistent with and complements the UNFPA accountability framework (DP/FPA/2007/20) and the UNFPA oversight policy (DP/FPA/2008/14). The evaluation policy supports UNFPA efforts to strengthen results-based management, as reinforced by the UNFPA strategic plan, 2008-2011 (DP/FPA/2007/17).

5. In addition to strengthening and complementing existing accountability and oversight mechanisms, the purposes of the evaluation policy are to: (a) increase the use of results in decision-making by management; (b) improve programme effectiveness; (c) strengthen national evaluation capacity; (d) contribute to the systematic utilization of evaluation findings; and (e) support organizational learning. Specific roles and responsibilities for evaluation are delineated in the policy, with the goal of increasing the use of evaluation results in planning and implementing UNFPA activities.

6. Section II of the policy defines key terms and concepts used in the policy. Section III lists the principles that guide the policy. Based on the principles in section III, section IV delineates roles and responsibilities for evaluation. Section V provides guidance on capacity development and resources, and section VI addresses the utilization of evaluation results and reporting. Section VII focuses on the review of the policy, and section VIII provides the elements of a draft decision for consideration by the Executive Board.

II. DEFINITIONS

7. UNFPA adheres to the United Nations Evaluation Group definition of evaluation as "an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, institutional performance, etc. It focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, in order to understand achievements or lack thereof. It aims at determining the relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions...An evaluation should provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons into decision-making processes" (paragraph 1.2, *Norms for evaluation in the United Nations system*, United Nations Evaluation Group, 2005).

8. In accordance with the norms outlined by the United Nations Evaluation Group, evaluation differs from monitoring and other review and oversight functions, such as audit and inspection. Monitoring is the gathering of data on the results of programmes, in order to assess, on an ongoing basis, the extent to which a programme is on track and achieving adequate progress towards expected targets and outcomes.

9. A prerequisite for evaluation is a coherent results framework. Results frameworks are developed when interventions are planned; they include statements of the expected results and the logical sequence of those results. They indicate how the activities undertaken lead to the expected results, and identify relevant performance indicators, baselines and targets.

10. The following definitions, drawn from the UNFPA oversight policy, will apply to the UNFPA evaluation policy:

(a) Accountability is the obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted with agreed rules and standards and to report fairly and accurately on performance results vis-à-vis mandated roles and/or plans.

(b) Oversight is the general process of review, monitoring, evaluation, supervision, reporting and audit of UNFPA programmes, activities, policy implementation and results. This is to ensure organizational, financial, operational and ethical accountability, effectiveness of internal controls, and the prevention of fraud and malpractice.

(c) Independence means that the necessary conditions of integrity and freedom from interference in determining the scope of, performing the functions for, and communicating the findings of internal audit, evaluation and investigation activities have been met. Any independent individual involved in such activities should have an impartial, unbiased attitude and avoid conflicts of interest.

(d) Transparency is a process by which reliable and timely information about existing conditions, decisions and actions relating to UNFPA activities is made accessible, visible and understandable to Member States.

(e) A thematic evaluation is an independent assessment of selected aspects or cross-cutting issues in different types of interventions that are crucial to UNFPA.

(f) Assurance is defined as the objective examination of evidence for the purpose of providing an independent assessment on risk management, control or governance processes for the organization.

III. PRINCIPLES

11. The following principles guide the UNFPA evaluation policy:

(a) In accordance with the triennial comprehensive policy review, evaluations will focus on performance in achieving development results. The evaluation function is undertaken with a view to strengthening national evaluation capacity and increasing the participation of national counterparts through inclusive and participatory approaches.

(b) Evaluation at UNFPA focuses on accountability, oversight and learning. Evaluation is utilization-focused, and provides credible information to support decision-making by management, and policy and programme improvement. It informs planning, budgeting, implementation and reporting.

(c) Management will ensure that evaluation is an integral part of the organizational standards of UNFPA, as emphasized by the triennial comprehensive policy review. As a part of a broader culture of accountability and managing for results, UNFPA seeks empirical evidence on the results achieved, using lessons learned to improve programme effectiveness.

(d) Evaluation at UNFPA will be carried out with the highest level of objectivity and impartiality. Centralized evaluations by the Division for Oversight Services achieve this through its structural independence from management. Management will not restrict the scope, content and recommendations of evaluation reports. Decentralized evaluations will ensure objectivity and impartiality through a variety of mechanisms built into the evaluation plans, such as the provision for external review experts, advisory committees and the use of independent evaluators.

(e) Managers are accountable for implementing the evaluation policy and ensuring that necessary follow-up is undertaken. UNFPA will continue to report on the progress of evaluation, in line with its accountability framework and oversight policy.

(f) The norms and standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group will guide UNFPA evaluations. UNFPA seeks to harmonize and align its policy with the evaluation efforts of United Nations system partners and other development partners through country-led evaluations and joint evaluations.

(g) Management will ensure that adequate resources are allocated for evaluations, including human and financial resources. Funds to undertake evaluations are built into the design of country, regional and global programmes.

IV. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

12. In accordance with paragraph 39 of the UNFPA oversight policy, the Executive Board will monitor UNFPA performance on evaluation through regular reports on evaluation submitted to the Executive Board by the Executive Director and the Division for Oversight Services.

13. The Division for Oversight Services conducts independent evaluations in accordance with the UNFPA oversight policy. The Division for Oversight Services also provides oversight for all evaluations, including monitoring and assessing the quality of evaluations.

14. Management is responsible for systems of governance, risk management, the internal control framework, the evaluability of programmes, the measurement of performance, and the evaluation of results and impact. Managers of all divisions and offices will undertake decentralized evaluations in their respective areas. For decentralized evaluations, UNFPA will put in place the necessary arrangements to ensure objectivity and impartiality.

The roles and responsibilities of the different levels of management are as follows:

(a) The Executive Director of UNFPA assumes overall responsibility for evaluation, and ensures an enabling environment for evaluation where planned evaluations are conducted and the findings utilized in programme design and delivery.

(b) The Executive Committee, chaired by the Executive Director, approves evaluation plans, monitors their implementation, monitors follow-up on evaluation recommendations, and uses evaluation findings to inform its decision-making.

(c) The Programme Division coordinates evaluation planning in UNFPA; fosters evaluation professionalism through advice, guidelines, training, and the sharing of best practices; ensures the quality of the results frameworks of programmes; ensures that UNFPA evaluation activities build national evaluation capacity; develops links with the United Nations Evaluation Group and related United Nations evaluation activities, including the coordination of joint evaluations; and ensures that evaluation findings are integrated into strategic policy and planning.

(d) Regional offices ensure that evaluations are undertaken within their programmatic framework, that the evaluations are professional and of high quality, and that information from monitoring and evaluation is used to inform their decision-making. The regional offices are accountable for: (i) providing support and technical advice to the monitoring and evaluation activities of country offices through regional monitoring and evaluation advisers; (ii) reporting annually to the Executive Committee on the quality of evaluation in the region; (iii) ensuring

that, at the programme planning stage, adequate results frameworks are developed for programmes, including a national evaluation capacity building component; (iv) ensuring the full and active participation of national counterparts in the evaluation process; and (v) seeking increased involvement in joint evaluations with partners, donors and programme countries.

(e) Country offices will ensure that evaluations are undertaken with their implementing partners and within the programmatic framework. Country offices are accountable for: (i) carrying out country-level evaluations consistent with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework; (ii) ensuring professionalism in the evaluations; (iii) ensuring that information from monitoring and evaluation is used to inform their decision-making; (iv) ensuring that, at the programme planning stage, adequate results frameworks are developed for programmes, including a national evaluation capacity-building component; (v) ensuring that there is full and active participation of national counterparts in the evaluation process; and (vi) seeking increased involvement in joint and country-led evaluations with partners, donors and programme countries.

V. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCES

15. UNFPA evaluations are carried out in a manner that enhances national capacity through the participation of governments and key stakeholders in evaluations, through support for country-led evaluations, and through the use of national evaluation systems. Capacity-building initiatives include guidance, training, and the sharing of good practices and lessons learned. In addition, UNFPA will work actively with United Nations organizations and other partners to strengthen national capacity for evaluations, including country-led evaluations and joint evaluations, as well as evaluations undertaken in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. UNFPA will provide the operational details of evaluation plans in its internal guidelines on evaluation.

16. To respond appropriately to the needs of programme countries, UNFPA will strengthen its capacity in evaluation through monitoring and evaluation advisers at country, regional and global levels. Regional monitoring and evaluation advisers support capacity-building in country offices and among programme countries. UNFPA will mainstream evaluation in the organization and ensure that programme and technical staff are knowledgeable about evaluation principles. Partnerships with evaluation networks, professional bodies, national and regional institutions, United Nations partners and other development partners will further reinforce evaluation capacity.

17. In accordance with the UNFPA programming guidelines, evaluation is required in every country, regional and global programme; therefore, evaluations are included in respective programme budgets. In order to achieve cost-effectiveness, UNFPA will strive to undertake coordinated and joint evaluations with national partners, United Nations system partners and other development partners.

VI. UTILIZATION AND REPORTING

18. UNFPA seeks to strengthen evaluation in order to strengthen accountability for results and ensure that evaluation findings are used to inform decision-making by management and contribute to more effective programming. As stipulated in the UNFPA accountability framework, managers are required to prepare management responses to evaluation recommendations and undertake the necessary follow-up. The Executive Committee, chaired by the Executive Director, will monitor progress in implementing evaluation recommendations. UNFPA will disseminate lessons learned from evaluations through knowledge management platforms.

19. The Executive Director reports regularly to the Executive Board on evaluation. In accordance with the UNFPA oversight policy, the Division for Oversight Services submits a report to the Executive Board on evaluation activities every two years. The oversight policy provides additional assurance of evaluations through the Audit Advisory Committee and the United Nations Board of Auditors.

20. Evaluations carried out in UNFPA will be assembled centrally, made available to management, and shared as widely as possible with external parties. UNFPA will share country evaluation reports with relevant national governments. In accordance with the UNFPA accountability framework and the UNFPA oversight policy, the Executive Director will normally disclose reports to the public, while exercising discretion in protecting the legitimate rights of programme countries.

VII. REVIEW OF THE POLICY

21. UNFPA will review the evaluation policy at the mid-point of the current strategic plan and at the end of each strategic plan. The review will seek to extract lessons and make improvements in the policy.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION

22. The Executive Board may wish to take note of the UNFPA evaluation policy contained in the present document (DP/FPA/2009/4) and provide guidance to UNFPA.